

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Larry Kobayashi, 62, retired camp store owner, Puunene

"Of course, right now, this place is phasing out. This about the end of the trail, here, now. So, naturally, it's quiet and not many people. It's exceptionally quiet. But at one time, there were lots of people here. Lots of people. Adults and children. People moving back and forth, here. Lots of activities....We had a bench here, and a bench here, and a bench all around."

Larry Kobayashi, Japanese, was born March 30, 1918, in McGerrow Camp, Puunene, Maui. His father, Zenzaburo Kobayashi, owned and operated the Z. Kobayashi Store in McGerrow Camp.

Except for his high school years, which he spent in Honolulu attending Mid-Pacific Institute, Kobayashi has lived in McGerrow Camp all his life. His boyhood years were spent playing and helping in the store, which had a barber's chair and pool hall. It served as the center of social activity in the camp.

In 1937, following his graduation from high school, Kobayashi started his own potato chip business in back of the family store. He cooked and packaged his product and sold it to retail stores. The outbreak of World War II caused Kobayashi to curtail the business.

Meanwhile, Kobayashi's father died, and ownership of the store was placed under his name. He worked at a defense job during the war while his mother and wife took care of the store. At war's end, Kobayashi took over full-time operation of the store. In 1960, he closed down the store. The building still stands today in what remains of McGerrow Camp.

Kobayashi today works for a tour company, and is a member of the Kahului Lions Club.

Tape No. 7-62-1-80 and 7-63-1-80

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Larry Kobayashi (LK)

March 7, 1980

Puunene, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Larry Kobayashi. Today is March 7, 1980, and we're at his home in McGerrow Village, Puunene, Maui. The interview is taking place in Mr. Kobayashi's living room, which was, at one time, [Z.] Kobayashi Store.

Okay, Mr. Kobayashi, can you tell me when you were born?

LK: March 30, 1918.

WN: And where were you born?

LK: Puunene, Maui.

WN: Which camp were you born in?

LK: McGerrow Camp. They used to call that McGerrow Camp. Later on, they changed to "village," I don't know why. But it's same thing. McGerrow Camp, they used to call it, but they call it McGerrow Village, now. I don't know what made the change, but it means the same thing--village, camp, you know.

WN: What was your father doing in McGerrow Camp?

LK: He operated a--they call it a camp store. You know, general store. Carried general merchandise, little of this and that. Groceries, and patent drugs, and, well, daily needs. Lot of various types of merchandise that people would need daily, but not in large quantities. Just a small store. More for the people's daily needs.

WN: So, as long as you can remember, your father had this store?

LK: Yeah, uh huh. He also--as far as I can remember--he also was a barber. He had a barbershop. Most of the time he did his work in the evening. Because the people, during the day, they did work, and during the evening, well, they could have their hair cut. They came in the evening. Some people came during the day--afternoon or

weekends. If weekends, well, during the day--Saturdays or Sundays. But mostly, week nights was when he did his work as a barber.

WN: When your father cut hair, did he close the store?

LK: No, that's when my mother took care of the store.

WN: What else did your father have besides that barber and a store?

LK: At one time, I remember, he also--at the very early part--did some baking. He had a small bakery. He did some baking. That, they did in the evening, too. They started early in the evening, and then they worked during the night--all night till early in the morning. That was more a night job. They started early in the evening.

WN: The next day, they would sell the . . .

LK: Yeah, in the morning. Early in the morning, people would go to work, see? They would want to purchase bread, and pastries, whatever.

WN: You said, in the beginning part, they had a---for a while, they had the bakery?

LK: Yeah, yeah.

WN: So, they quit after a while?

LK: After a while, yeah. Later on, a bakery came up in Alabama Camp called Puunene Bakery.

WN: Was that run by the Oda family?

LK: Yeah, that's right. As a matter of fact, when they started the bakery, they had a baker coming from Honolulu. But since he didn't arrive, I think my dad went there to assist during the early part of the opening of the bakery there. My dad did help out during the early stage of the opening of the bakery there.

WN: Your dad was the baker, not your mother?

LK: Well, my mother did baking, too, but they both did. My mother did baking, too. They both knew how to bake.

WN: For example, what did they bake?

LK: They baked bread, doughnuts. And they had one favorite of the people called "anpan." They had that. Kind of a beans in there--sweet beans. They also had that same anpan, they fried it in deep oil like doughnuts, too. Deep-fried anpan, they had that, too. And pies. And cupcakes.

WN: Do you remember, like anpan for example, how much cost?

LK: I'm not sure, but I think they were about nickel apiece. Most things were about nickel apiece, you know. That, I remember, they used to cook in the evening just about the time that the movies that were at Puunene Theater was over. People would be coming home. You can smell the delicious odor in the air. People come by, and those that wanted hot pastry would buy that.

WN: While they were making, they would sell, too?

LK: They could sell it, too, yeah. Uh huh. Some people, they like hot things.

WN: From what time to what time would the store be open?

LK: I would say, early in the morning, somewhere around 4:30 or 5 [o'clock], I guess. You know, early--that early. They would be baking at that time, so they have the store open, too.

WN: And then, they opened till nighttime?

LK: Yeah. At night, well, he'd be doing some other work. At the time they were having baking, they would be baking bread. But after the bakery was over--they stopped baking--well, he had the barbershop, so he would be cutting hair, yeah? So, in any event, he would be working long hours. During the day, maybe he can take a rest because that's when people go to work, and there won't be too much activities. That's when, maybe, he can take a little rest. But yet, not too much, because some people come and have their hair cut during the day, too. But not too many people because most people go to work.

WN: Where would the barbershop be?

LK: It was right in the same building as the store. Right next door.

WN: Was it separated by something or was it . . .

LK: Yeah, there was a wall between, and then, had a separate entrance. The entrance was out there. Right by the . . .

WN: It was the porch . . .

LK: Yeah, porch. Right by the porch. You had to go by the porch, and there was one door there. Later on, he transferred it to downstairs, where--I'm getting a little ahead of the story, but--he had a one-table pool hall there. He had that for a long time, but then, he sold it. Then, he started to have his barbershop in the former pool hall or pool room.

WN: The pool room was just adjacent to the store, too?

LK: That's right. Right down.

WN: So, at one time, he had a store, and a barber, and a pool table?

LK: Yeah. So, he stopped operating the pool room, and then, he moved the chairs down there. He had two chairs up here . . .

WN: Barber chairs?

LK: Yeah. But when he moved down there, he added another chair because he had more room there. So, he had three chairs there.

WN: He had three chairs, but he was the only one cutting hair?

LK: No, he had part-time help. He had a young man and a young lady assisting him. They're part-time. He was the only full time. They came to help him part-time.

WN: When you were a youngster growing up in this area, what were some of the things you did to have a good time in McGerrow Camp?

LK: Like any other kids growing up here, I joined with the other kids here. Lot of things to do. They had marbles season, and they had other sports during the day. School took quite a bit of your time. During the day, you go to school. You go to English school, and as soon as you're through with English school, no sooner you rest for little while, then you go to Japanese-language school. So, by the time you get home, you don't have much time to play. But during the weekends, like even on Saturday, you had to go to Japanese school.

WN: Really? Six days a week?

LK: Yeah. You go to school on Saturday--Japanese school. You didn't have any English school, but you had Japanese school.

WN: From your house to the Puunene English School, how far you had to walk?

LK: Ah, I don't know exactly how many miles, but it took at least forty-five minutes to get there. Thirty minutes, forty-five minutes, depends on how fast you can. Later on, I went by bicycle, so I went pretty fast. And lot of kids went by bicycle, too. If you walked, it took, I would say, between thirty to forty-five minutes, though. At least, you know. I think you are familiar with the distance. You been around here for a while. The proper way was to take the highway, but we used to walk by the train track, which was a shorter way, which was a dangerous way, and which was not the recommended way. But in those days, they were not very strict, I guess. There were few casualties, so they probably weren't that strict. That's the way we used to travel, right . . .

WN: You used to walk along the train tracks?

LK: Yeah, yeah. Not every day was [cane] harvesting season for that

area, so the train didn't pass there every day. Be, maybe, in some other area, you see? Not every day, trains pass there. Maybe so many times a year, trains would be passing through there because it would be harvesting in that area. So, some people passed through that area, and some people passed through the main highway, which is a longer way to go. But I went by bicycle, so I went by the main highway, which is smoother riding, anyway.

WN: What about the Japanese school? Where was that?

LK: Right near the Puunene School. Right across. There's a ditch, and across there.

WN: Was it near that Catholic church?

LK: No, the Catholic church would be on this side [i.e., the same side as Puunene School]. It's [i.e., the Japanese school] directly across. In fact, I think, during the war, that Japanese school was used as a USO [United Service Organizations] Center. It's a pretty good-sized Japanese school.

WN: How many kids would be going to Japanese school?

LK: Oh, quite a bit, though. Because the majority of, I think, the students that went to Puunene School were Japanese children. I would safely say about 75 percent.

WN: Oh, 75 percent of the Japanese kids went Japanese school?

LK: No, I would say that nearly all [the Japanese students at Puunene School] went to Japanese school. You know, the enrollment there at Puunene School, 75 percent, to me, were Japanese. Looks to me that way. So, they went to Japanese school. They all went, so far as I know. There were very few that didn't go for one reason or the other. They either played hookey or some of the parents didn't care, but most, majority, went to Japanese school. They were very strict, too. Japanese school made sure that, come rain or shine, you attended school. You have to be very careful. You have to have a good reason why you didn't attend. You know how they discipline very much in Japanese school.

WN: Was it more strict than English school?

LK: Yeah. Certainly. Yeah. But, you see, [at Japanese school] time is limited--just one hour. So, during the one hour, it's a cram course. During the one hour, they have to teach you everything. Everything has to be taught in one hour, so they have not much time to lose. They have no time to dillydally. The teachers have to be strict. Everybody come in class on time and sit down, and the teacher go directly into teaching. They have many courses, you see? Reading, writing, and everything. No arithmetic, though, but reading and writing, and some other things. I don't remember

arithmetic, though. That was in English class, but they had other things. They had lot of other good things they taught in Japanese school.

WN: You folks had outdoor games, like that, Japanese school, too?

LK: They had, sometimes, exercise.

WN: Oh, undō?

LK: Yeah, yeah. The whole school, they assemble, certain days, before the school--especially on Saturdays. The whole school, the whole student body, they assemble. They line up. And then, the principal, he didn't need a loudspeaker. He had good, strong voice, and he would lead the whole student body in exercising. I remember, some kids faint, and then some kids, they have nosebleed and all kind, but most of the children, they were healthy. You know what I mean, they could take it. It used to get hot when they exercise. I think they were on the right path, the right idea--exercise--but that was, unfortunately, only once a week. Other days, they didn't have time.

But once in a while, the whole student body had lecture on some kind, if they had some kind of trouble in the camps, or trouble in English school, or something. The Japanese school principal would give the whole student body lecture on what's right. I think, in that way, he set a very good example on what's right and wrong. Try to guide the Japanese students to be good students. "Try to get ahead, and try to do your best." You know, encourage the students.

WN: How far away would the kids come to go Puunene Japanese School?

LK: Some came from very distant places, but then, the sugar company--plantation, you know--they furnished them transportation. They came by automobile trucks.

WN: Like what places?

LK: Like, maybe, Kihei way. You know, Camp 13, Camp 1. Some places like Green Camp, I think, they came by taxi. I don't know who paid for it, though, but . . .

WN: Every day, taxi?

LK: Yeah. I think, in the morning, they came to English school, and they stayed right through till Japanese school was over, I think. This is, I'm just assuming, now, I'm not too sure. And Camp 6 also, I think, they came by taxi. I'm not sure, now. But could be, they came by truck, too. But the plantation was nice to furnish trucks. That's how they used to come to school. We used to envy them because they came right to school by automobile. Right to the

campus of the school by car, rain or shine.

WN: The car would wait for them until Japanese school was pau, too?

LK: That, I'm not so sure. I think they waited till the English school was over, because, otherwise, I think, they would have to pay overtime to the drivers, I guess. I think, now. What I'm telling you is lots from assumptions, see? I'm just assuming. I'm sure by the time the English school was over, I think they had to get on board and go home. If you wanted to go home after Japanese school, well, you were on your own, I guess. That's when the taxi came in, I think. I think you went by taxi, or some neighbor came to get you. Oh, they had some arrangement, I think. I don't know.

Because we had some students come from places like Camp 6 and Camp 7. Camp 6, definitely I know. Camp 7, maybe, they went to Kihei School, I don't know. That's closer to Kihei, you see, Camp 7 is. But Camp 6 is, I think, closer to Puunene. But I know Camp 13, and Kihei, and Camp 1, somehow, they used to come to Puunene school, though--language school, Japanese school. I know the students that used to come.

WN: So, there probably wasn't a Japanese school, then, in Kihei?

LK: Ah, I don't think so. Shee, they had grammar school there, though. I don't know why they didn't go there. Shee, I don't know. I'm kinda . . .

WN: You mean, were there some Kihei kids that came to Puunene English School?

LK: Camp 13 came. Kihei, I think they went to Kihei School. Yeah, they didn't come to Puunene School. Camp 13, that's another direction, see? Camp 1, I think, they went to Kihei School.

WN: You know, McGerrow Village, about roughly, how many homes had?

LK: Well, let me think, now. Shee, roughly, yeah? We had another camp, see, across the track, there. That was part of McGerrow Camp, too. They had eighteen homes there, and they call that Eighteen Home Camp. But that was part of McGerrow Camp. Eighteen homes there Let's see, one row would get how many houses? Roughly, yeah, you said? (Pause) One row would get about ten to twelve homes, you see. So, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty

WN: How many rows had?

LK: They had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven At that time, you're talking about? Not now?

WN: When you were growing up, yeah.

LK: I'm just estimating, yeah? (Pause) Wait now, this home is

WN: Was it under 1,000?

LK: You mean, the number of homes in this camp? No, no, no. In the hundreds, though, that's all.

WN: You told me earlier that's one of the biggest, though, eh?

LK: Yeah, yeah. This camp was one of the biggest. This camp and Alabama Camp. So, you figure, about ten homes in each row. Right now, I counted seven rows. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven Maybe eight, I think, get row. And that side, they have some more homes, but they were brought in later. When we were here, there were no homes there. So, when I was here, at least, there were 100 homes. There could have been more. But, at least, I would say, 100 homes. Now, I'm just guessing out loud.

WN: When you were growing up, was mostly Japanese?

LK: No. Japanese and Filipinos.

WN: Was it about equal?

LK: No, no, no, no. Majority is Japanese. I would say, Filipinos would be one-fourth, maybe. Three-fourths, Japanese.

WN: What kind of community events were there around this area?

LK: The Japanese people, they celebrated New Years. And you'll be surprised, they celebrated Tenchō-setsu. You know what's that?

WN: Emperor's birthday?

LK: Yeah. They did that, too.

WN: What did they do?

LK: They just gathered at the clubhouse. We had a clubhouse--community hall, over here. Was right over here. Now, we had another one over there. That's a new one, but it's kind of rundown, too. We had right over here.

WN: Not too far from your house, then.

LK: Yeah, right there. Right back here, we had one. And then, as the years went by, it got kind of deteriorated. So, they brought one ready-made one. Then, later on, it [i.e., the old clubhouse] became a [boy] scout hall. The clubhouse moved this side. They made a brand-new clubhouse. A brand-new one, prior to the war [World War II]. Where the old clubhouse was, they made a scout hall for scouts and cubs. In those old days, I remember, the Japanese

people celebrated New Year and Tenchō-setsu.

WN: You said, they would gather around at the clubhouse?

LK: Yeah. And they would have speeches by--well, this camp, they had a club, officers of this camp. You know, president, vice-president, and treasurer, and secretary, whoever. Well, the president would make a speech--very short speech--commemorating the day. Just remind them that this is a eventful day, that the emperor's birthday, and so forth and so on.

And then, the kids would all line up, and they would give them a small token of gifts. Today, to us, things like apples and oranges don't mean much. We eat them every day. But in those days, it's not a common thing, you know. I mean, well, maybe some homes were fortunate, but most homes, they don't have those things every day. But when come to those special days, they passed out--like Christmas, would be--so they passed out. They would have a package--an apple, an orange, and a bag of candies--for each child. They line 'em up, and they gave each child that lined up a package for attending the ceremony.

And New Years, this whole row [of homes], they start with the first person on that list, see? He would be the official greeter for this year. When New Year comes, he would be the greeter. He goes to each home and greets Happy New Year to each home.

WN: The first person on the list?

LK: Yeah, first house.

WN: First house of the row?

LK: Yeah. The next year, the next person goes--the man of the household--and so on down the line. They rotate. He goes, and in Japanese, of course, he says, "I wish you a Happy New Year. And may the New Year bring you much happiness and long life," and so forth. Naturally, they say in Japanese, "Shinnen-o-medetō," and all that. They express that. That was the custom.

Each area had a community bathhouse. We had one here right nearby. In this community, we had three. This place was big, see? We had three community bathhouse. Now, the man next door took care of that. His family took care of that. But the plantation, they supplied the wood. He supplied the labor. He chopped the wood, and cleaned the bathtub, and scrubbed the Kept the bathhouse clean. Every night, they had to change the water and clean that place up. They put new water in there, and then they put wood, and keep that hot water going from early in the morning. Because some people, they have night duty, eh? Yeah, that thing has to be--keep on going--hot all the time. Japanese people like 'em real hot.

WN: How big was the tub? How many people could fit inside?

LK: Quite a bit, though. Wait, let me see, now. I would say the tub would be about almost half of this room.

WN: From here to the curtain?

LK: Yeah, about from here.

WN: Twelve feet?

LK: Say from here, about this big. So, quite a bit can go in, eh?

WN: About twelve feet around, then?

LK: I guess so, yeah. And they had two pipes---no, one pipe, yeah. Because all they need is one pipe, because that's cold water. That is to offset the heat. The other one is boiling from underneath when they had that water going. The kids were the ones that don't want 'em too hot, so when the young kids go in there, that's when trouble starts, because the old people like it real hot. When the kids go, they want it to be lukewarm because their tender skin, eh? Well, they don't care. They want it just comfortable. So, they go and put lot of [cold] water. Once you put lot of water, you know, it takes a little time to get heated up, because they firing from underneath.

WN: The men and women had separate ones?

LK: Separate. This side is women, this side is men. And they had one more for the Filipinos, too. They don't want 'em hot, too. They can't stand this hot kind. They don't want it. So, instead of getting lot of friction, they made one small one for the Filipinos.

WN: Three sections?

LK: Three sections.

WN: Is it one main tub and partition or three separate tubs?

LK: Three separate tubs. They make it so that everybody be happy. Filipinos can make it lukewarm. They cannot stand hot kind. Kids cannot stand, but kids, the make 'em, they don't care.

When the old men come, they bawl 'em out and say, "Hey, come on! Get out, you kids! Why you people make it lukewarm? If you folks want to shower"--they have shower, but the shower is only cold water--"If you want cold water, take a shower. Why put all that water in here? You just ruined this hot bath. We want a hot bath because it relieves our aches and pains, because we tired from hard work."

Those people who do lot of hard work in the fields, lot of hot water take the grime and dirt away, too. Give 'em a good, clean

scrubbing. Then, all what they do is take a good scrubbing, and go in there just to soak in there, and then come out.

WN: Would you go any time of the day for furo?

LK: Yeah. Yeah, there's no time limit. But at night, I think, certain time, they have to clean it. So, say about 10 o'clock, I think, already, they start cleaning the thing. So, for 10 to 12 [o'clock], in the span of time, you might not get hot water. But after midnight, maybe, you start getting hot water, already.

WN: You could go after midnight?

LK: I think so. Because they have scrubbed the place and put fire in there, already. Because they get midnight gang who come back from work from the mill, too, I guess. Although I didn't use that facility that time of the night.

WN: Who paid the guy to tend the furo?

LK: The individual. The man knows how many people in that house. He has a tablet for each row [of houses]. He has so much X number of rows that he take care. And the other furo man has X number of rows. He has the name and the members of the family. Infants, no charge. But he probably charges the husband and wife, and, maybe, children up to certain age. Maybe, children up to certain age, half-price. Monthly rate. Maybe the man pays dollar, the lady pays dollar--that's two dollars. And the kids pay fifty cents, fifty cents. So, maybe, he pays three dollars a month [for the family]. That's good because he don't bother about nothing.

WN: How far you had to walk from your house to the furo?

LK: Right down here. Close.

WN: About what? Twenty yards?

LK: Yeah, yeah. Right down here. So, it was quite an experience because your friends all get together, do a lot of talking. Get together, sit down. Lot of fellowship.

WN: What time of day did most people go to the furo?

LK: In the evening, say, about Let's see, the boys go after 5 [o'clock]. I think plantation people used to have dinner early, about 4 o'clock, like that. After dinner, they go.

WN: When you folks ate, did you get all your goods from the store to cook your foods?

LK: Mostly, I guess. Some, we had peddlers--fish peddlers come around. We bought fish from the peddler. Most time, fish peddlers used to

come around with the fish. He sold only fish.

WN: How often would he come?

LK: Maybe about once a week, I guess. I think fish were more plentiful those days, I guess. Not there, now, I think. I don't know. But he would come around. Vegetable peddlers sold fresh vegetables. I think they came nearly daily. Early in the morning, they just screaming all around the place. We didn't sell vegetables--fresh produce. They grew their own, I think, and they sold their own. They didn't get from wholesale. They grew their own and sold their own. They said they had their own place where they grew.

WN: Any other kind of peddlers besides fish and vegetable? Do you remember?

LK: When I was small? No. Later on, just prior to before I closed this shop up [in 1960], we had about couple of peddlers came in here. About two peddlers.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Were there other stores in this area--McGerrow Camp?

LK: For a while, they had. Not when I was real small, though, but when I was operating [LK's store]. For a while, one time--they had a fish market next door. The man did peddle, too. He went out peddling, too. He had a truck, and he went out peddle, too. When fresh fish came in, he sold fresh fish. When he went out peddling, he had some other things, too--grocery. Oh, he had vegetables. Not too many can goods. Most, fresh produce, he had. Vegetables, and he had fish, and some other Japanese goods. But not can goods. He didn't have much can goods. But some other produce, you know.

WN: So, your father's store was one of the only ones, then, in this area?

LK: Well, for a long time, yeah.

WN: How far away was the nearest plantation store?

LK: You know where [the remains of] that store is, from here?

WN: Camp 5 Store?

LK: Yeah, that's the one. How far would you think that was? I don't know. Would be about . . .

WN: About a mile.

LK: . . . about a mile, though, yeah? Definitely about a mile, though. Maybe more than a mile. At least a mile, though. But, in the past, I tell you, it was more than a mile. Way down where they have the present chemical plants. I don't know if you seen 'em. That's where it [Camp 5 Store] was for a long, long time. They had a store there for a long time. This is comparatively--well, let's say--new, but this is the second store that they built. The original was way down there.

WN: Was the second store bigger than the first?

LK: I don't know. I really don't know. About the same, maybe. The other store was quite big, too.

WN: Did the order men come to take order?

LK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They came. They came around. One man came to take the orders, and one man did only delivering.

WN: Did your parents buy from the plantation store?

LK: I don't think so. Not that I know of. Maybe they did, but I don't think so. Maybe if they had something on special. Because, as I told you, my uncle had a store, too, in Kahului.

WN: Yeah, Kobayashi [Shōkai]. Would they come over here, too?

LK: Yeah, yeah. They did the same way. They had a man that took orders. In their case, they couldn't afford a man only take order. He took orders, and he delivered, also. They were not that well-off. The man that took order, he took order, and then, the next day, he delivered.

WN: So, Camp 5 Store came, and Kobayashi [Shōkai] came . . .

LK: Onishi. Japanese Mercantile, Ikeda. Because there were lot of people [living] here. Most of them sold on account. When payday came around, they paid off. Charge, you know? Not cash. They all on account.

WN: Were the salesmen [order takers] coming from morning till night?

LK: I think, the Camp 5 Store, the salesman [order taker], usually, he started in the afternoon, I guess. Because the people were home, huh? Or, maybe, it's the other. Maybe they started from morning. Maybe it's housewives who were home. He knew where to go. Maybe in the morning and afternoon, where to go. He had so many areas to cover today and the next day--what areas to cover. Because he had a big area to cover, I guess.

WN: Seems like there were lot of salesmen [order takers] around. Do you think people bought from one or they tried to buy from all? What

made them buy from one and not from another?

LK: Well, that I can't tell you. Maybe they knew the salesman [order taker] or for some reason or the other. Like, take an example. I don't know where you buy your things from, but you have many supermarkets in Honolulu, now. Let's put it this way, what supermarket do you buy from?

WN: Safeway.

LK: You don't buy from others?

WN: Depends if I'm in the area.

LK: You in Manoa, eh? And Safeway is in Manoa. One reason you buy from Safeway because the price is almost comparable, and it's close to you. Why should you spend more gas and go running around other places? Isn't that the reason why?

WN: Yeah, but if people come to you from different stores, were the prices all, more or less, the same?

LK: More or less, the same, yeah. Competitive. So, maybe, I think, they used to buy some from this person, some from this person, to be fair. They probably want to see everybody happy. Because like I say, I think the prices must have been competitive, or not, they couldn't be in the business. Like all the supermarkets. The prices were so different. One place was so high and one place was so low. The one so low would be in business, but the one so high wouldn't be in business. Because you look at the prices. Look at Safeway, sometimes, their prices--certain things--are so low. But then, when you look at certain times, it's the same with other stores; sometimes it's higher on certain items. But they average up. You cannot tell that one place is higher than the other, because when you take the overall average, they should average up. Otherwise, one outfit cannot be in business long if they going to be constantly higher than the other.

WN: What about your father's store? Was his prices about the same?

LK: Well, I don't know about the other guy's prices too much, because we don't buy too much from other people. But, I guess, must have been quite competitive or the other people won't buy. So, like I said, some things must have been higher, but some things must have been lower. And the people that buy know that. You know what I mean? So, they must be competitive. So, something must have been higher; something, lower. We don't know because we don't go around comparing, and those days, they don't advertise. So, how can we tell? Only the buyer is smart. He think that we selling certain things cheap, they start buying plenty from us, and we don't know. By the time we find out, then we been underselling some other people.

WN: Did you folks give credit, too?

LK: Yeah. But, if possible, we try not to give too much because our resources are limited. Because we are small operators. We don't have that kind of assets. Big stores, they have reserves. We don't have. So, we try to operate on cash and carry. And people know that. They don't buy big quantities, either. As I told you, we are mostly on convenient store basis. And people tell you that they only need two cans of this.

WN: So, you said, your father's store opened till later in the evening. What were the plantation store hours?

LK: Oh, maybe, 4 o'clock in the afternoon or 5 [o'clock], they close up.

WN: Weekends?

LK: Weekends, too.

WN: Closed?

LK: Closed. So, if you want something badly, they don't care what it is, they ain't going to open it up because they can't do it. Just for somebody want a can of beans, or couple packs of cigarette, or somebody has a headache and they want bottle of aspirin, they not going to open up. Whereas, in the corner grocery store, that's the beauty of it, see? Like anyplace you go, people appreciate that. So, I guess, in certain ways--maybe, certain things--our prices were, maybe, higher, but they [customers] were glad to get it because they just have to have it. And convenient, eh? So, there's a purpose for a corner grocery store. You think how those stores in big towns survive, but they are surviving. They might not be making a mint, but they seem to be getting along all right. Don't you think so? I don't know.

WN: When you were growing up, what kind of things did you do around the store?

LK: When my folks tell me just mind the store, I just stay in there, and sit around, and wait on customers, which was not altogether pleasant, because I like to go out and run around with the other kids. But, well, it's not altogether hard. It's not physically hard. It was not real unpleasant. You meet people. People come in, and they all pleasant. You get to know the business and you get to know the people. It's all right. At least, it's not boring. It's almost the same people that come around, but it's not the same person come ten times a day. It's different people coming in different times of day. Maybe, next day, the same kind of people come, but, still, you get to be friendly, and you get to know them. Some people, you get to know real well; you get real close. You get to be more than customers-and-store relationship. You come to be friends, like.

WN: Did people come and hang around the store?

LK: Yeah, yeah. Some people, they just sit around. I guess they have not many things to do, and they like to stay, sit around here, and see people come and go.

WN: I notice there's a porch right out here.

LK: Yeah, yeah. Some people like that, rather than staying home, I guess. In those days, radio was the only thing. We had no TV. I guess they like to sit around and see people come and go. I notice, when we had that pool table, lot of people! They want to play. Lot of people.

Of course, right now, this place [McGerrow Camp] is phasing out. This about the end of the trail, here, now. So, naturally, it's quiet and not many people. It's exceptionally quiet. But at one time, there were lots of people here. Lots of people. Adults and children. People moving back and forth, here. Lot of activities. Children playing and adults walking around. Some going to the community bathhouse, some coming back. You know, you can hear people greeting each other here. People going to work, and some coming back from work. Just people. It's like a city, but it's a rural community, of course. But it's full of life. Lot of people. Never a dull moment. Till it gets dark. Then, people don't stay up late because they get up early in the morning.

So, at night, the only place that you see lot of lights is here. Because people come here to have a haircut, or come to purchase something, or just to sit around and shoot the bull. They come over here--men. Mostly men folks come out, because women folks, they stay home. But some women come out, too, sit down. They want to hear the latest goings-on around here, I guess. They come out here. We had a bench here, and a bench here, and a bench all around. We had benches in there, too.

WN: In the pool hall?

LK: No, in the barbershop. We had a long one. Built-in kind. We had people where they want to play Japanese chess, cards, or whatever they want to. Some people just came to meet people. Talk with them. Some people, bachelors like that, they had no place to go. They come here, and just sit down, and talk with some of our customers or whoever.

So, sometimes, I meet some of the people that, in the olden times, they used to come around. They have fond memories about places like here. They ask me how everybody is, and if we have the store, yet. Some kids, they big now. They forgot lot of things, but they haven't forgotten this place. They ask me, "You still have the store?" And this and that. They can't forget it. It's something they enjoyed. They have moved to Honolulu. Sometimes, we have had

children of relatives that come from Honolulu during the summer to visit. First place they came is the store. To buy things, to buy shave ice, or something. And they hang around the store. They never forget that, never. Matter of fact, I met one girl.

The first thing she tells me, "You still have the store?"

I said, "Why?"

"Oh, I'll never forget the store," she says. She's a grown woman now, but she says, "I'll never forget the store."

I said, "Did you enjoy?"

She says, "Yeah, I used to enjoy my summer vacations, coming down here."

From the city to the country, you know? So, I don't know, it's something like that. But, right now, everything so quiet because--like I say--the trend has changed, now. We're in a transition where this area is phasing out. You can see that. As soon as people move out, that's it. It's gradually phasing out. This place is going to be no more. This one of the old ones, you know.

WN: Things like the [Japanese] chess, like that. Did the men bring their own to play?

LK: We had our own. My dad supplied that. Because, you know, to bring that--those things are heavy. I don't know what happened to . . .

WN: Go?

LK: Yeah, go. You know how heavy that table [i.e., go board]. Ooh, that table is heavy, you know. At that time, my daughter was not in the business of buying and selling. We sold it. Somebody bought it. They were so happy to buy that. We had couple. And they bought the round, black and white things [go pieces], they bought all that. I think we had that other game. You know, that other . . .

WN: Shōgi?

LK: Shōgi one. They bought that, too. I was sorry, though, now. When I think about it, we should have kept it, because those . . .

WN: Very expensive.

LK: Oh, yeah! My, those things were authentic. And they have the history back of it. You know how many men played with that? But, those are available, I guess, if you want to buy it. But those are all made of hard wood. The other one's [i.e., go pieces] made--I don't know--made from stone. Certainly not plastic because, those

days, they didn't have plastic. But look like plastic. I don't know what they made of, but they're black and white.

WN: Shiny, yeah?

LK: Yeah. They must have been made from stone. Marble or something.

WN: So, this place was the last place to close for the night, then, where people could meet?

LK: Yeah, as far as I know, in those days, in this area here. When we closed up, well, everything close up, I guess.

WN: Were there places inside the store where they could sit down and shoot the bull?

LK: Ah, not very much. Like I told you, we had one small exit here, door. And this part, here, was the . . .

WN: Right on the side of the door?

LK: Yeah, yeah. We had a hallway about this wide, that's all. And we had . . .

WN: Three feet wide?

LK: Yeah, about this wide, that's all. And we had few chairs. So, some customers sat down. And we had showcases here.

WN: Right in the middle of the store?

LK: Well, right here.

WN: Near the entrance.

LK: Yeah, near the entrance. That entrance was blocked there, already. They couldn't come in the store. You got to come in from this way, now. Maybe till here. And then, from here, you could come in the store. Till here was a low table, and they had showcase like, and candies and things like that inside.

WN: Could people reach and grab what they wanted?

LK: They came inside [the counter], if they want to. Yeah. The next was, they had that ice cream cabinet. Was inside. But more so, they were served more. Everything was packaged. We had all small package, big package. Everything was neatly packaged. And people wanted it to be packed. If they buy a bar of candy, they want to put in a package. That's a fact. Today, you just give 'em like that. But, before, people are different. They wanted formal. They'll put in the package. Everything, package. We used to buy lot of paper packages. But that was the mode of the day. That's

the way it was. Everything had to be packaged or wrapped. So, I had this [roll of] string. I put 'em up. I hook 'em up, and then I bring 'em down. And I had one roll of paper, here. So, I push 'em down, and I can rip 'em. Bring 'em down here, wrap 'em up. You know, packages cost money in the long run. Paper cost cheaper. And strings are cheaper. So, I used to wrap 'em. Everything. If you buy four, five [writing] tablets, wrap 'em up.

WN: Oh, even tablets?

LK: Yeah. Everything. They want it wrapped. Everything was [just] so. But packages would be more convenient because you just dump 'em in, and you give 'em. But up to a certain stage, if you buy one big package, this much full, it's worth it. Because the packages you buy, if you buy this much package or this much, the cost is not too much difference. The cost of making it is not too much. Material going in there, not much, too. But the cost of making it, that's the thing. The material going into it, it's just slightly more, but to make it takes that much more time to make it. But that was the trend, before. They demanded more service, before, the people did. Today is more help yourself.

WN: So, the can goods were behind the counter?

LK: Yeah, yeah. It was lined up over there. I told you, we had shelves there, where we had window.

WN: Oh, you mean . . .

LK: Sliding door. I took it off.

WN: When you took over, you took it off?

LK: Yeah. I tell the people, "Pick 'em up."

WN: But your father's time . . .

LK: Yeah, they had it--sliding door. Customer say, "I want two can of that." The clerk picks it up, bring 'em down, put 'em on the counter. "I want four cans of that." Bring it here, okay. And you wrapped it up--put in the cans--and put in the paper bag, whatever. You give him service. The customer just stands there and be served.

Today, they have a good system. If all the customers did that, there would be a backlog of customers standing up at the supermarket. But since the customer is working for it--they don't know it, but the customer is working for the supermarket. But by the same token, they can keep the cost of goods down because of that. But if they all had to stand up and be served, the price of goods will go up. They have to hire more clerks, don't you see? So, it's a good system--the modern way.

It's just like buffet. Buffet, you don't have to hire that many waitresses. That's why they can serve you that many varieties of food for that X number of dollars. If you were to be sat down and be served by a waitress, and you had 200 people to serve

WN: You said earlier that your father did give some credit?-

LK: Yeah.

WN: Who did he give credit to?

LK: After a while, you get to know people. And people realize that, too. They don't ask for credit right away. After a while, they get to know you and they say, "This month a little hard, so can you extend me little credit?" And you do. People not that way where a total stranger come tell you. But some people do, but very few. Most people, after establishing good relationship, and being a good customer for quite some time, and then they ask you. After that, I guess, they ask you again. They say, "Can we continue." Then, since they reliable, you say okay. But we didn't encourage because we cannot keep a big accounts receivables. Cannot afford to.

WN: Did your father deliver for people?

LK: I remember, if he did, he did very little, though. One time, I remember, early in the morning--that time, he wasn't baking anymore already--but he had some orders for people that wanted early morning delivery of bread. I know, some summers, I came back from school, and he asked me to help him. And I helped him make early morning deliveries of bread. Some people, they go to work. While they still sleeping--we know their homes, you see--we don't wake them up. We just put it on their verandas just like how you deliver milk. They want, maybe, one bread, and, maybe, two pies or two biscuits, whatever. We just leave it on their veranda over there. Some would be awake, already. And some will pay cash right away. But those that are not up yet, we just leave it on the veranda, and we keep on going. They pay us later. That's the only time I saw him deliver things.

Like I say, when I took over [in 1945], I did deliver most of the heavy things, like soda pop. You know, they in bottles and wooden crates, and they heavy. I used to deal in feed, too. Feed and rice, like that, heavy. I used to deliver them. But most things, people used to buy and take it home themselves. But if they buy feed, and same time, if they buy lot of grocery, well, I'll deliver for them. But if they can manage, they used to take it home. I didn't encourage delivery service too much because most of them didn't buy that much at a time.

WN: As you got older, you went to Honolulu for school? What school did you go to?

LK: Mid-Pacific Institute.

WN: Would you rather have stayed here to go school?

LK: I don't know. I think it was a good experience for me to go to a boarding school, meeting people from all islands. The first year I was little lonely, but I got over it. You know, freshman year, I was little lonely, being fresh out of home, and everything. You had to do everything yourself. But everybody is in the same boat there, and you get to work together. And I got along with the other boys, so was all right.

WN: Before you went to high school, did your father tell you things like, "I want you to take over the business," or something like that?

LK: No, he didn't say anything.

WN: So, you came back in 1937, and you started your potato chip business about that time?

LK: Ah, maybe about little later. Maybe about 1938, I think.

WN: What made you do this?

LK: Well, I figured I wanted to do something. Go into business. Maybe I got influenced by my folks. You know, they went into their own business. I wanted to try. My folks weren't too keen about it because they felt that I should gain experience working for someone first. But I was full of enthusiasm, I guess, and I wanted to take a chance, myself. So, well, in summers, I used to work cannery and all that, so I had little savings. I said with whatever savings I had, I said I want to try. So, I went ahead. Good experience.

LK: So, how you got the idea?

WN: When I was in Honolulu, in my neighborhood, I used to visit a factory. I figured it didn't look too hard for me. When I came back, I saw the possibilities, so I started.

WN: How much . . .

LK: It was just a hunch. Five cents a bag.

WN: No, how much you needed to start? Capital?

LK: Ah, little over \$100. Not much.

WN: What did you need to start?

LK: Equipment. Equipment, that's all. Equipment, that's the main thing.

WN: Like what?

LK: One cooker, that's the main thing. Get a vat. Underneath, they have a burner. And you need oil. Packages. Rather simple, because you don't have to mix any ingredient. You just use potatoes. Well, I was young. I had lot of stamina and lot of ambition. If things didn't go good, well, that's all right.

WN: Where did you make the potato chips?

LK: Right in that other room, there [in the same building as the store]. Yeah, the place changed, so you cannot tell, but I told you I had a sink this side. I had a table on two sides, where we did the packing. I had two vats--two cookers--over there, two machines. All of that is changed, because it was a kitchen. It's cramped up, but make it easy to work because you take few steps, and you there already. You didn't have to run around. You take one, two [steps], and you dump in your goods, already. Everything is close by. I didn't figure that way. It was out of necessity that I did that, because I didn't have a big place. I couldn't invest in building.

I had in mind to enlarge later on, but somehow, when you start doing other things, as the years go by, you lose interest, already. You get lazy. It's not the easiest work. You know, take long hours. I used to work from about, in the morning, early, and then work late at night. But while you doing it, you doing it, see? But once you lose the continuity, well, you know. You take something, and you start to work for somebody, and not much responsibility, too. Just work the hours, and that's all.

WN: You folks lived in the back of the store, yeah?

LK: Yeah, right there. You know where . . .

WN: You used the kitchen of your home to make the potato chips?

LK: No, kitchen over here. I have kitchen, here.

WN: So, you used another room?

LK: Yeah. Over here had kitchen. That, I used. That was my old kitchen. I converted that to a [potato chip] factory. That was our bakery, before. So, underneath had all galvanized. The floor was galvanized. We had a wood stove over there. So, it just fitted good. I put my cooker on top there. That was the bakery, [before].

WN: Your potato chips, did you sell outside? The chips you made?

LK: Oh, yeah. I used to make. But only packaging, I didn't do. I hired people to package that. And I used to deliver it, myself. I was the one that went out and promoted that. I go out, I hit the stores, talk to them, and I sold 'em, I delivered. Once I get a store started, that's it. Then, I deliver steady, already. I get

my routes. I established my own route and add on more [customers]. Add on, add on. You know? I couldn't afford to put a delivery man because they not going to promote. I had to be the promoter, because I'm the one that made that, and I got to promote that.

WN: What was the name of the potato chips?

LK: Kitch'n Cook'd. That was the factory that I bought the equipment from. No franchise, they just let me have the use of the name.

WN: That's the same name as . . .

LK: Yeah, yeah. My cousin them using. Then, I sold the machinery to somebody, and somebody sold to somebody, and down the line. And finally, my cousin them got it. They started, see?

WN: So, are you saying that you're the original . . .

LK: No, I won't say that. Not exactly. There were other people that do it, too. But on Maui, I used to do it quite early part of the potato chip business. Early.

WN: Where you got the potatoes from?

LK: I used to use both local and Mainland, but Mainland, mostly. I get local wholesalers. He imports his one, I think.

WN: Who did you get it from?

LK: Local importers. There are lot of people, they import potatoes here. Any importer. Because they the one that can give you the best price, huh? But when you're young, you have lot of ambition. You get lot of enthusiasm.

WN: So, you started this with a hundred dollars?

LK: Little over \$100, I think. Maybe about \$150. I don't know. I just don't remember, now. (Chuckles) It's so long time ago, yeah? Those days, things were cheap, too. You know what I mean? Not like now when things are so high.

WN: Where did you get the machines from?

LK: From the Mainland. I imported from the Mainland.

WN: Was there anybody else on Maui making that kind potato chips?

LK: I think there was another group that made under another company, but they did it for just a short while. They gave it up. You know, another company. They didn't last too long. They gave it up. They got discouraged, I guess. We had room for two [on Maui]. There's always room for more than one company, because I don't know

if I was producing enough. I was just starting, and he was starting, too. But wasn't long before he gave up. Another couple. He and his wife used to make. Lot of times he was not consistent. Some days, he don't deliver. He's out of it. He either didn't want to work or--he was much older than me, the couple was--either didn't want to work or--kinda happy-go-lucky couple, you know--he either didn't want to work or maybe he didn't have the money to buy potato, I don't know. But he just didn't care much.

Like in my case, I wanted to make sure that I was able to supply the market. What surprised me is that, later on, some people, they demanded, on Sunday, that I deliver. And I was thinking, "Shee, boy, who's the boss? Am I the boss or my customers?" But when I really analyzed the situation, I felt that I would be happy, somebody demanding something. That's to my credit because they're not saying, "Don't come," they say "Come." So, well, I used to work half day on Sunday, which is, maybe, not the right thing to do, work on the Sabbath day, but I used to work.

END OF SIDE TWO

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WN: The potato chip, do you remember how it was done? I wouldn't know how to start to make potato chips.

LK: Well, the process is simple. It's just a matter of slicing that potato and frying it in deep oil--cottonseed oil.

WN: How did you slice it? By hand?

LK: I did by hand. Today it's done with machinery. Machinery is faster and everything. I used to do by hand. It was attached right to the vat. And when I sliced it, slices fell right into the vat.

WN: The vat had the hot oil . . .

LK: Yeah, yeah. It was right there. Well, that's the only way I knew to do at that time, and I didn't mind the exercise, I guess. With just myself and another person doing, that's about enough time element--the speed--we needed, because the equipment was not that big, you see. Just enough, you know. If you had a big equipment, you got to get slicer, and you have to slice more so that it fills up the vat. We call it "vat." But we don't need that much. So, in the allotted time, where the oil is cooking, you have enough time to put in so much, cook so much, and get it out. Then, you start the next batch going. So, everything worked out. Well, that was already designed by the company to work out that way. If it was a bigger equipment, you probably need machinery, because then

you have to slice faster and in bigger quantities so that you can fill up that vat. Otherwise, the oil gets too hot, and it will burn your product. This is all timing. Later on, you get to know the timing. You have the thermometer, but still then, you got to know how to feel the oil, already. You know, just when to put it in and take it out, and then put the next batch in. Everything comes natural.

WN: So, equipmentwise, what did you need besides the vat?

LK: Vat and that slicer, that's all.

WN: Slicer was by hand? A knife?

LK: It's circular, and it has about four blades, I think. And it has a hopper. Put that in, and then you spin that.

WN: Crank it by hand?

LK: Yeah, crank it by hand. It's nothing complicated.

WN: From the very beginning when you started, about how many bags would you make in one day?

LK: Started with one bag. Two bags, later on. Three bags, four bags. You know, as time go on, you start increasing like that.

WN: You sold it wholesale, then, to each store?

LK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You sell that to the retailer. You sell in dozen lots. Small, five-cent bags, I used to sell. Later on, I used to make that big package. I didn't make the twin bags, though. I went as far as make fifty-cents bags, I think. I didn't reach the point where I made twin bags, yet.

WN: What stores on Maui did you sell to?

LK: Most stores on Maui carried, though. Whether they took lots or little, I tried to cover. I figure, well, whether they took dozen or two, I didn't neglect; I kept 'em. I figured that exposure was the main thing. Later on, it pays. Not because they took plenty that I serviced them. Whether they big or small customers, I took care. And I found out that that was a good thing, even if took time. I think the best thing is to just take care everybody. That's what I think one of the good rule in business--take care everybody, whether they small or big. Because small guys might come big one day. You never can tell. They might turn out to be your good customer.

Some of my customers, they told me, "Oh, we don't want it [i.e., potato chips]."

They turned out to be my good customer. I didn't force it.

I said, "Okay. But if you ever want it, you call."

"Nah, we don't want it."

One guy, he tells me, "This not for me. I don't think I'll ever sell these things here."

One day he call me up. He say, "You know, some people calling."

I say, "Okay."

He tell me, "Don't feel bad, now. I refused you few times, you know."

I said, "That's all right. Now, you not refusing, you calling me. You calling me, I'm coming. The main thing, you calling me now."

That's the guy made the call. He said he wants on Sunday, too.

I said, "Look what happened. You the first guy calling me on Sunday, now."

He said, "Yeah, I didn't realize."

I said, "I'm only sorry because if you started early, you wouldn't have missed some of the business."

He said, "Well, cannot help, yeah?"

WN: These people, the retailers, they paid you cash?

LK: Yeah. Most cash. Only few places I didn't collect cash because their system was not to pay cash. They're mostly big places, where they don't pay out cash. So, I said okay. Nothing to lose, eh? The first time they didn't come through, I won't give 'em already. So, was good. Cash business.

WN: And you kept your own records?

LK: Yeah.

WN: Did you sell the chips in the store?

LK: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Why did you give up the potato chip business?

LK: Later on, I don't know, I just think that I lost interest in it. I didn't think it was much more business already. Well, I lost interest, that's all.

WN: Was it making money?

LK: Well, making, but for all the work I had to do, I figured there must be some other way out. That's why. If I didn't have the interruption, I might have just kept on going, but you get interrupted like that, yeah?

WN: You mean, the war [World War II]?

LK: Yeah. Well, maybe that's a poor excuse, I don't know, but that's one of the reasons why. Sometimes when you get the continuity, good, yeah? Keep on going, you know. Sometimes when you get interrupted, you get waylaid.

WN: How did the war interrupt you?

LK: I couldn't get the supplies. Everything was rationed. Potatoes rationed, and oil rationed, already. Difficult to do business that way. So, I figure, well, no use fight, eh? People dying, and why should I be fighting for potato when everybody need potato. You know what I mean? It's a ticklish situation, you know. I could have gone in with partnership with one guy who was working for the wholesaler, but I don't want to work that way. If I cannot supply the very people that built me up, I don't want to. He want to make, but he want to only supply who he wants to. And I'm going to do the groundwork, and he going be my selling partner just to get the goods. I couldn't see that, so I said no. Rather than that, I said, "Well, you buy my equipment. I sell you." So, he in partnership with another person, I think. Then, they worked little while. Partnership is not easy. And then, didn't turn out so well, so they sold it to another person. That thing changed hand quite a bit.

WN: Kept up the same name?

LK: Yeah, same name. And my cousin, lately, well, he was there at the right time, the right place, I think, yeah? So, he made it real well. But it's lot of work. It's not as simple as how people see. It's lot of hard work, not that simple. Lot of work involved. But anything, anything good, you know, you got to work hard at it. Nothing comes by easy. Anything good, you got to work hard.

WN: So, while the war was going on, you worked the defense job?

LK: Yeah, yeah. Over here, yeah.

WN: And your father died about . . .

LK: Just before the war.

WN: So, how was the store operated between the time your father died and the time you took over after the war?

LK: I put it under my name, I think, and my mother was in the store.

She watched the operation. I was out working down there at the Navy base, so she had to stay here. I worked from early in the morning to late in the afternoon. Worked from about 5:30 [a.m.] to 5:30 at afternoon, I think. Worked right around the clock.

WN: Who was helping your mother in the store?

LK: My wife. Yeah, both of them. They did all right. (Laughs)

WN: By that time, was the barbershop closed?

LK: Oh, yeah. Definitely. Nobody to---that barbershop was closed, naturally. Because my dad, he was the main person. Barbershop closed quite some time, already, because my dad was already not feeling well. He was sick. He was not feeling well.

WN: So, after the war was over, you took over the store. What kind of changes did you make when you started running the store?

LK: I enlarged this place a little. I would say, almost double the size of the store, and rearranged the store a little, and equip the store a little more modern.

WN: Like what did you put?

LK: I put new showcase and I put new freezer. I sold more freezer goods and all that. So, there's some changes, not too much. Some changes, we made.

WN: You doubled the size of the store?

LK: The space, yeah. Because this much, and that much, I added on.

WN: Oh, because this was the old barbershop [adjacent to the original store area]?

LK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WN: So, you converted that into . . .

LK: Into store space, yeah?

WN: Who helped you out when you were remodeling and everything?

LK: Oh, one of my friends. You know, two of my neighbors. One next-door and one living few houses away, I asked them to help me. Well, this, I had to do it on my own, because that's the agreement I have with my landlord here. They don't do any remodeling, or they don't do any altering, or they don't do any improvement, or they don't do any repair work. I had to do it on my own. That's the agreement I had. That's my agreement. So, I hired them, and they did the work.

WN: Your landlord was the plantation?

LK: Yeah, yeah. They are my landlord.

WN: How much rent was being paid?

LK: Well, I like to keep that confidential because it's so very low. (Laughs) Because we been here long, and they've been very kind to us. Because the building is old, that's why we have that special consideration, I guess, because we pay our own and everything.

WN: When you took over, what kind of changes in, say, the goods that were in the store were made? What did you sell that your father didn't sell?

LK: Let's say, I think what I sold what my folks didn't sell was a lot of frozen goods. At that time, I think, frozen goods were not too popular. You know, when my folks were operating. So, since I had a freezer, I sold lot of frozen goods. You know, chicken, and vegetables, and things like that--frozen type. And by the same token, the things that I did not sell were a lot of patent medicine that my folks used to sell. Oh, they had this place full of both Japanese and American patent drugs, you know. Oh, from toothache drops to whatever you can think of. I don't know . . .

WN: The powdered kind?

LK: All kinds. Yeah. Those days, I don't know, people used to (chuckles) rely on the corner drugstore, I think. We were not drugstore, but we had mostly patent-kind drugs. You know the kind that don't need prescription. That kind. We cannot sell prescription kind, anyway. We don't have any pharmacist. But people rely on all kind.

WN: By the time you took over, they wasn't any?

LK: Ah, they had only very few. I didn't stock up. I just stock very simple things like, maybe, Bufferin, Anacin, and aspirin, and Feena-mint, or something that I'm really familiar with. Something I can explain to the customer. Not something, if the customer ask me, "What's this for?" I have to hesitate or read the label. Like this, if it's Feena-mint, I know what's Feena-mint is for. If it's Anacin, I know. If it's Bufferin, I know what's Bufferin is for. And aspirin, I know what's aspirin for. I don't want to get lot of things that I don't know what's that for, you know, and people get hurt. I don't know, I'm just little more careful, I guess.

People say, "Oh, why don't you carry this? Why don't you carry that?"

But I said, "No. You want to get that, you go to the drugstore."

I don't want to carry. I'm afraid that somebody might take a

overdose of this, and they get sick, and I get into trouble. I keep away. I make few dollars, but I rather sleep well.

(Laughter)

LK: Yeah. But in the olden days, I don't know, people just relied on the corner store for everything, I guess. From headache to toothache to whatever.

WN: What else did you stop selling?

LK: Well, they [LK's parents] had lot of dry goods. People used to use lot of kerosene, so they had that kerosene lamp wicks, and all kind. I should have kept 'em because some people asking for that now. Things like that. You know, lot of dry goods, which I thought they were not necessary. So, I didn't carry as much inventory--variety of inventory--as my folks did. They carried everything. Soup to nuts. Yeah, they carried lot of things.

WN: Did they carry clothing, too?

LK: No, no clothing.

WN: What changes did you see in, say, the operating hours?

LK: We didn't operate late. And people didn't come out because we didn't have the barbershop. So, people didn't come out like they used to, when I was operating, already. I guess they had the radio, too. You know in those days, not many people had radio. I remember, one time when they had a world boxing championship, one man here in the corner in my neighborhood had a radio. Had people from far and wide come to hear that championship bout. You know, like that, where only few people in the community had a radio. But by that time, people had radio, so people didn't come out at night as much. And people had cars. More people had cars; they go out there on their own. They had places to go, they go. But in the past there, people didn't own cars, and they didn't have any mass transportation here. They had no other place but [to] come to the corner store and socialize.

WN: Was there less buying when you took over? I mean, were there less people coming in the store to buy things, too?

LK: Ah, people didn't charge. You know what I mean? I had less credit buying, more cash. People started to buy cash more. I guess I lost the people that did charge.

WN: So, that was your policy--cash?

LK: No, not exactly, but they just When my dad passed away, I went around to settle the accounts, eh? Because it's going to be me, now, going operate. I want to close that account. Sad to say,

some people didn't settle. And it's a terrible thing, don't you think so? You know, after a man give 'em credit for food and bare necessities of life, some people cannot come across and have the decency to pay few dollars that he owed that man when they were in such dire need? We not asking handout. We just asking what is justly owed my old man. Most people paid, but a minority didn't pay. They say, "We'll settle it later on." But I didn't even put in the papers, because people just in this neighborhood who owed him. But I went personally to them and told them to settle their accounts, because he had passed away, and then the business will be in my name later on because he passed on. He died in Japan, see? Lot of of people didn't know.

So, I told 'em that, "I know you folks didn't [know]."

They said, "Oh, we didn't know."

"Well, I'm just telling you now. So, at your earliest convenience, if you can" I brought the statement to them. "This much you owe, see? So, the store will be under my name later on, so I like you to settle this account."

So, those who paid that, most of them didn't open their account, already. They started buying cash. And some, very few, minority, didn't settle. That's too bad. Well, no big thing, but terrible.

WN: When you took over after the war, about how much in one day would you gross?

LK: Shee, not much, though. That's why I didn't stay in the store. I did go out and do other work. I did various types of work. My wife and my mother kept the store going. Because by that time, already, I see lot of peddlers start coming in. And that was already coming to the point where people got modern. They start going out--they had cars--they start going out and buying things. So, the trend changed, see?

WN: Did you father make more in one day than you did?

LK: Ah, not necessarily, but I think he made better than I did because, lot of time, his were most services, eh? You know what I mean?

(Sound of knocking on door. Taping stops, then resumes.)

LK: . . . the trend started to change, so, I would say, the business didn't exactly pick up too much. I would say, during the war, demand was much greater. People were more excited, eager to buy things. Money didn't mean much. They wanted to buy. So, if we had anything, they wanted to almost buy over what they needed. They wanted to keep extra things on hand because of the conditions of that time. They didn't know when the next shipment was going to come or whether they going to have anything. You know, if we were going to have things.

So, like I said, at that time, if I receive things like ham or bacon, they wanted the whole bacon or the whole ham. So, I used to take little time out and divide that. Like if I can cut the bacon in half, I'll cut 'em in half. They come in slabs, eh? And try to divide, you know. Because if I give people first come, first served, I got a line up here, and the person who's last in line don't get any. You see? When things started back to normal [when the war ended], people were not that anxious to stockpile their goods, so business was not brisk. So, as I said, this type of business is for convenience, so the volume will not fluctuate too much, like going up. You see what I mean? So, I did various types of other work. I did try it, anyway, while we had the store. Like in my dad's days, he used to do different kind of Not only operate the store, but he had the bakery, and he did barber work, and he did lot of different type of work.

WN: And then, eventually the people started to move out of the camps?

LK: Ah Yeah, some people started to move, gradually. Yeah, I think from that time--I'm not too sure when they started to relocate, but I think gradually, they started relocating.

WN: Shortly after you took over, probably, yeah?

LK: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So, I was not in business exactly the right time, either. My folks were in business quite the busy time when there were lots of people here and not moving around. They were stationary type. They didn't have the means to move about. They were stationed here. They didn't have the cars--you know, automobiles--to travel around, yeah?

WN: So, what are the basic differences you see between when you took over and when your parents Other than the stationary

LK: (Pause) Well, I don't know what you mean. But like I say, I think the trend of the people changed. They were not dependent much on the corner grocery store. Their dependency changed.

WN: How do you feel about the change?

RN: Well, I accept the change. I feel that it's just one of those things that came about. It was just a natural change. It's nobody's doing. It's a natural change, that's the way I feel. And this is something that was going to come about, I guess, and it came about. I guess there's nothing anybody could have done about it.

END OF INTERVIEW

**STORES and
STOREKEEPERS of
Paia & Puunene, Maui**

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

June 1980